

THE JOURNAL'S OPINION

CIA Essential To Security

The CIA man put away his dark glasses, took off his rubber-soled shoes, stripped away the false beard, raised his voice above a whisper, and there stood Richard Helms, director of the CIA, talking—but not telling—to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington.

Helms' recent public appearance as director of the United States Central Intelligence Agency was unprecedented. It was the first such appearance before a non-governmental group. The reason—persistent misunderstanding and criticism of the CIA. Such criticism questions the need and the propriety for a democratic society to have a central intelligence agency.

The critics assert that the CIA is an "invisible government," a law unto itself, engaged in provocative undercover activities, and is subject to no controls.

The contrary is true Helms said: It does not advise on nor "make" foreign policy, and it operates under considerable control. "There are, in fact, four committees of the Congress to which we have reported regularly," he said, "not just on our foreign intelligence product but on our operations, our plans, and our organizations—ever since CIA was created in 1947. Periodic calls for a 'Congressional watchdog committee' may have suggested...that no such mechanism exists. On the contrary, there are elements of the Appropriations and Armed Services committees in both the Senate and the House which...are told more about our activities and our operations than are known to most of the personnel in our highly compartmented Agency..."

The CIA is basically what the term "central agency" implies. It coordinates the evaluations of intelligence (a word meaning information plus interpretation) of all the intelligence components of the U.S. government. These components, besides the CIA itself, are the Defense Intelligence Agency, intelligence components of the various armed services, the National Security Agency, intelligence elements of the Department of State and—when

appropriate—those of the FBI and the Atomic Energy Commission, to name the obvious. The CIA, however, is the only agency whose primary mission is to collect, evaluate, and produce *foreign* intelligence.

American intelligence activities did not begin with the CIA, he pointed out. George Washington personally directed his espionage networks during the Revolutionary War. U.S. intelligence agencies have existed since the beginning. Then why a Central Intelligence Agency? The proximate cause cited by President Truman in 1947 when CIA was established was the experience of Pearl Harbor, when, as quoted by Helms, President Truman stated:

"... if there had been something like coordination of information in the government, it would have been more difficult, if not impossible, for the Japanese to succeed in the sneak attack... In those days the military did not know everything the State Department knew, and the diplomats did not have access to all the Army and Navy knew. The Army and Navy, in fact, had only a very informal arrangement to keep each other informed as to their plans."

The Central Intelligence Agency was created not to replace, but to coordinate the existing intelligence elements of the U.S. government.

The National Security Act of 1947 charters the CIA to gather foreign intelligence—from reading the papers to "secret service" spying. The "secret service" activities, Helms said, "have always been secondary to the production of intelligence, and under direct control by the Executive Branch. Obviously I cannot go into detail with you on such matters, and I do not intend to." Nothing devious about Mr. Helms' manner of speaking, that's obvious.

Good intelligence can narrow down choices of expensive defense measures, he pointed out, saying that such narrowing down can save the U.S. taxpayers many times the cost of such intelligence

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